



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

October 28, 2004

# News Release

## **FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS OFFICIAL OF STEALING FROM KICKAPOO TRIBE HEALTH SERVICE**

DEL RIO, Texas—A federal jury here convicted a former director of the Kickapoo Community Health Services in Eagle Pass, Texas Wednesday following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The conviction was announced jointly by San Antonio Special Agent-in-Charge Alonzo R. Pena and Western District of Texas U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton.

Maricela Mendoza, 49, was convicted on charges of theft and money laundering. She faces up to 30 years in federal prison and a maximum \$750,000 fine. Sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 7 before United States District Judge Alia Ludlum.

The jury convicted Mendoza of all three charges contained in an indictment handed down in November 2003, which was one count of theft from a health care benefit program, and two counts of money laundering. The jury also awarded the federal government a monetary judgment against the defendant in the amount of \$102,155.29.

In rendering their verdict, the jury found that from Sept. 8, 2000 through October 2002, Mendoza stole funds from the Kickapoo Community Health Services, a program established by the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas and federally funded by the United States Indian Health Service.

Testimony provided during trial revealed that this money was to be used to pay healthcare providers for medical treatment and medications for Kickapoo tribal members.

“Maricela Mendoza betrayed the Kickapoos’ trust by stealing their money. She used her position as the director of their health care program for her own personal gain, and not for the benefit of the people who trusted and relied on her. Today, the jury held her accountable for her crimes,” stated Sutton.

“ICE targets the means that criminal organizations earn, move and store their illicit funds,” said Pena. “Through Operation Cornerstone, we seek to enhance financial security and public safety through aggressive investigation and enforcement against criminals who exploit vulnerabilities in the U.S. economic system for their own profit or to advance their agendas.”

In addition to ICE, agents from the following agencies are conducting this ongoing investigation: IRS Criminal Investigation, U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General, and the FBI.

Assistant United States Attorneys William R. Harris and Joe Sepeda are prosecuting this case.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.*